

30 YEARS OF PIELC

Tell your friends “I’m going to spend the weekend at a law conference” and they’ll figure you are in for a really horrible couple days. But when it comes to the UO’s Public Interest Environmental Law Conference (PIELC), attendees are actually in for some fun and excitement.

From intense discussions of social justice and environmental laws to dance parties and bumper stickers that ask you to “Eschew Fecundity,” PIELC has it all. The theme this year, the conference’s 30th anniversary, is “New Frontiers: The Political Crossroads of Our Environmental Future,” and according to Aileen Carlos, one of the law student organizers, the conference will continue its tradition of fostering dialogue and stirring up controversy.

Sometimes that controversy happens at the panels. PIELC co-organizer Bob O’Halloran Jr. says the scheduled speakers include activists, public interest attorneys and attorneys from giant corporate law firms. Other times the controversy is a little more stealthy — the halls at PIELC have been stalked by undercover federal agents. And a large portion of PIELC’s conversations happen in those hallways lined with tables from an array of organizations that this year will include Occupy Portland, Oxford University Press, StoveTeam International and Cascadia Wildlands.

Organizer Katie Cummings says PIELC will have panels focusing on the local — Mayor Kitty Piercy and Commissioner Pete Sorenson are among this year’s presenters — as well as panels that are more national and international in scope.

Keynoters run the gamut from the multimedia performance of Climbing PoeTree to Lisa Heinzerling, who was the lead author of *Massachusetts vs. EPA*, a hugely significant environmental case in which the Supreme Court held that the Clean Air Act gives the Environmental Protection Agency the authority to regulate greenhouse gases.

Environmental geeks will be excited to hear talks by endangered snail darter attorney Zygmunt Plater and by scientist Tyrone Hayes, whose research has shown that the widely used herbicide atrazine chemically castrates and feminizes exposed male amphibians at levels deemed safe by the EPA.

If chemically transgendered amphibians don’t suck you in, go to pielc.org and peruse the variety of topics the conference features. Conference co-organizer Alek Wipperman assures *EW* it will be far from “stultifying.”

At the end of the day, the parties start. Friday night is the PIELC party, or come dressed as your favorite radical to Saturday night’s Civil Liberties Defense Center “Solidarity with Earth Defenders Free Radical Dance Craze” at Territorial Vineyards.

The conference runs from the afternoon of March 1 to the morning of March 4 and organizers say it once again will be fueled by free coffee. PIELC itself is free, but there are many good causes to donate to.

— Camilla Mortensen

HIGH STAKES, YOUNG FOLKS

Half a decade ago, 17-year-old Alec Loorz saw a future so bright he had to wear shades — and that got him worried. Now Loorz, speaking March 2 at PIELC, is committed to saving his generation from the disastrous effects of climate change.

Without serious action, Loorz warns, he and the rest of his generation will have to cope with the aftermath of past generations’ lack of climate policy: floods, droughts, wildfires, more intense hurricanes, melting glaciers and species extinction.

Loorz is part of several lawsuits that aim to prevent the worst of climate change from happening. The suits are based on the public trust doctrine, which says that certain resources, such as air and water, are for everyone, and that individuals can’t ruin them at the expense of the public. Two Eugene residents, Olivia Chernaik (11) and Kelsey Juliana

(15), brought a suit to the Oregon courts.

“It seems like bringing this issue to the judicial branch is something that really has a chance to be powerful,” Loorz says. “It seems like if this has a chance to create some real change, it really would be ground-breaking — it would be a historical moment.”

The suits seek to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 6 percent each year, effective immediately. The plan is based on NASA scientist James Hansen’s conclusions on what is needed to save the planet.

“It has to be big,” Loorz recognizes. “That 6 percent number, that’s what science says needs to happen if we actually want to avoid the worst effects of climate change.”

Loorz founded Kids vs. Global Warming at age 12, and he has spoken to more than 300,000 people about how climate change will affect his generation. “When I first started doing

this I had nothing: no money, no contacts and no idea what I was doing,” he says.

He says he’s learned both the scientific and the philosophical in the past five years. He envisions a widespread change in mindset that questions the way “we value short term interests like money and convenience more than anything else, and I feel like if we actually want to solve climate change that’s what you have to change.”

Loorz isn’t the only teen speaking at the conference. Nelson Kanuk, a native Alaskan from Kipnuk who is also 17, will speak about how climate change is already affecting his family. They’ve lost eight feet of land in the past year, and the river will reach their home if it rises another 40 feet.

The Atmospheric Trust litigation plaintiffs, including Loorz, Kanuk and Montana farmer John Thiebes, speak 5:30 pm Friday, March 2, at PIELC. — Shannon Finnell

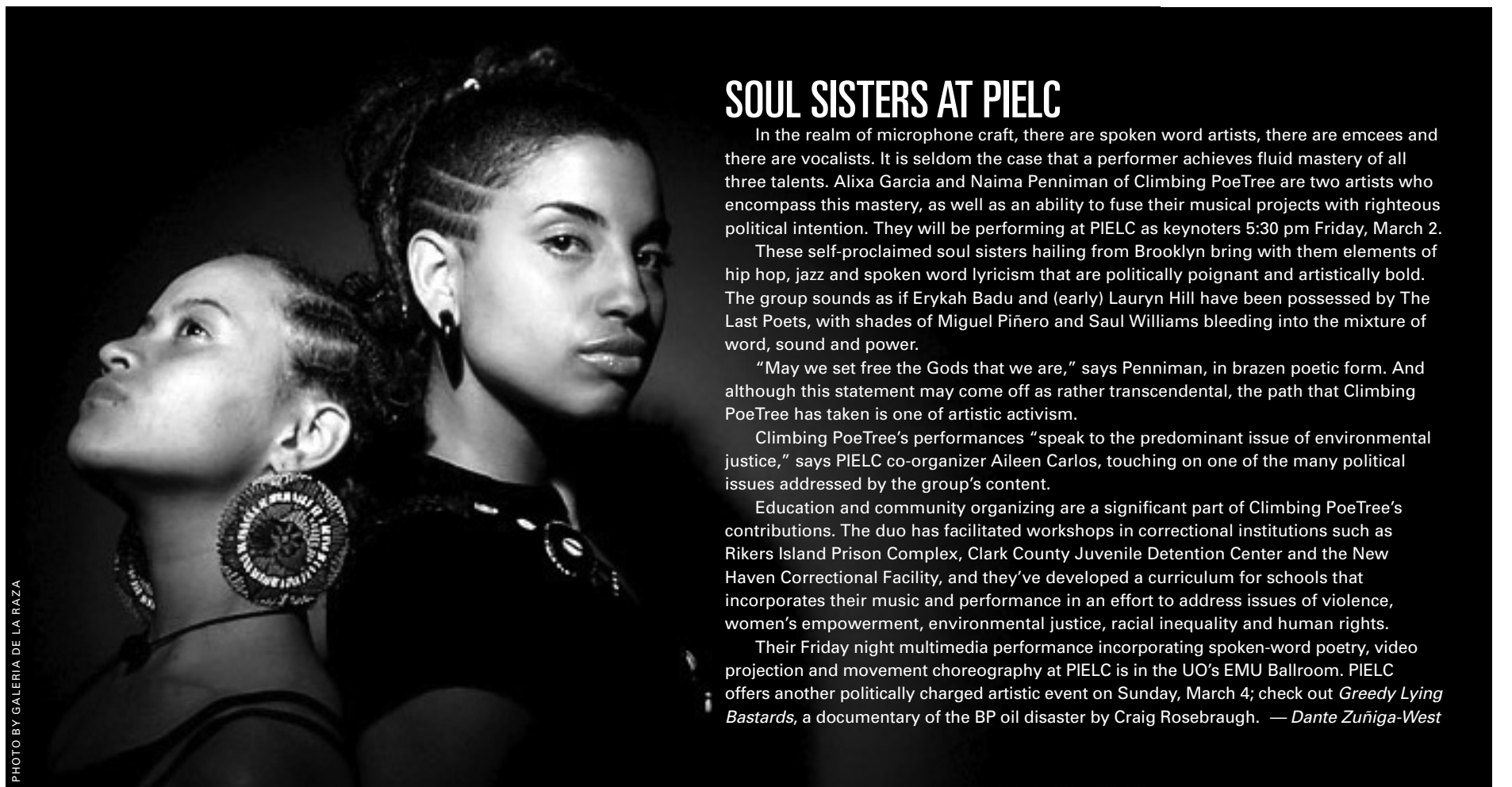


PHOTO BY GALERIA DE LA RAZA

SOUL SISTERS AT PIELC

In the realm of microphone craft, there are spoken word artists, there are emcees and there are vocalists. It is seldom the case that a performer achieves fluid mastery of all three talents. Alixa Garcia and Naima Penniman of Climbing PoeTree are two artists who encompass this mastery, as well as an ability to fuse their musical projects with righteous political intention. They will be performing at PIELC as keynoters 5:30 pm Friday, March 2.

These self-proclaimed soul sisters hailing from Brooklyn bring with them elements of hip hop, jazz and spoken word lyricism that are politically poignant and artistically bold. The group sounds as if Erykah Badu and (early) Lauryn Hill have been possessed by The Last Poets, with shades of Miguel Piñero and Saul Williams bleeding into the mixture of word, sound and power.

“May we set free the Gods that we are,” says Penniman, in brazen poetic form. And although this statement may come off as rather transcendental, the path that Climbing PoeTree has taken is one of artistic activism.

Climbing PoeTree’s performances “speak to the predominant issue of environmental justice,” says PIELC co-organizer Aileen Carlos, touching on one of the many political issues addressed by the group’s content.

Education and community organizing are a significant part of Climbing PoeTree’s contributions. The duo has facilitated workshops in correctional institutions such as Rikers Island Prison Complex, Clark County Juvenile Detention Center and the New Haven Correctional Facility, and they’ve developed a curriculum for schools that incorporates their music and performance in an effort to address issues of violence, women’s empowerment, environmental justice, racial inequality and human rights.

Their Friday night multimedia performance incorporating spoken-word poetry, video projection and movement choreography at PIELC is in the UO’s EMU Ballroom. PIELC offers another politically charged artistic event on Sunday, March 4; check out *Greedy Lying Bastards*, a documentary of the BP oil disaster by Craig Rosebraugh. — Dante Zuñiga-West